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Measuring Sustainability Credibility: Development of a Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII) in the FMCG Personal Care Sector

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Abstract

The increasing prominence of sustainability in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector has intensified the need for credible evaluation of green marketing claims. While many personal care brands position themselves as environmentally responsible, the absence of standardized and verifiable measurement frameworks creates challenges in assessing the authenticity of such claims. Existing approaches, particularly Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) metrics, are largely limited to publicly listed firms and fail to capture sustainability practices of privately held green brands. This study addresses this gap by developing a Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII), a structured and quantifiable framework designed to evaluate sustainability credibility based on verifiable certification indicators. The index incorporates multiple parameters, including ISO environmental standards, organic certifications, ethical production practices, and sustainability disclosures, each assigned weighted scores reflecting their relative rigor and credibility. Using publicly available certification data, the GCII is applied to selected FMCG personal care brands to classify them into varying levels of sustainability intensity. The findings demonstrate significant variation in certification-based sustainability credibility across brands, highlighting the limitations of claim-based green positioning. The study contributes to green marketing literature by introducing a replicable and transparent measurement model that enhances comparability, reduces subjectivity, and provides a practical tool for researchers, marketers, and policymakers in evaluating sustainable brand practices.

Keywords: *Green Marketing, Sustainability Credibility, FMCG Personal Care, Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII), Greenwashing, Certification-Based Sustainability.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, escalating environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and pollution have significantly reshaped both consumer consciousness and corporate priorities. These global concerns have accelerated the transition toward sustainable consumption and production practices, compelling firms across industries to integrate environmental responsibility into their core strategies. Within this evolving landscape, green marketing has emerged as a critical strategic approach, enabling organizations to align business objectives with environmental sustainability through eco-friendly product design, ethical sourcing, responsible manufacturing, and environmentally conscious promotion.

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The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, particularly the personal care segment, represents one of the most dynamic arenas of this transformation. Characterized by high consumption frequency, rapid product turnover, and intense brand competition, the sector exerts substantial environmental pressure through packaging waste, chemical usage, and resource-intensive production processes. In response, FMCG firms have increasingly adopted green positioning strategies, emphasizing attributes such as natural ingredients, toxin-free formulations, cruelty-free testing, biodegradable packaging, and sustainable sourcing practices. These developments reflect not only regulatory and societal pressures but also the growing demand from environmentally conscious consumers seeking safer and more sustainable product alternatives.

However, despite the increasing visibility of green marketing practices, a critical challenge persists: the credibility of sustainability claims. The proliferation of "green" labels, eco-friendly assertions, and ethical positioning has created a complex marketplace where consumers often struggle to distinguish between genuinely sustainable brands and those engaging in superficial or symbolic environmental claims. This phenomenon, commonly associated with greenwashing, undermines consumer trust and weakens the effectiveness of sustainable marketing efforts. As a result, the question is no longer whether brands are positioning themselves as green, but rather how credible and verifiable these claims truly are.

Existing approaches to evaluating sustainability particularly Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, offer structured mechanisms for assessing corporate environmental performance. However, these frameworks are predominantly designed for publicly listed corporations with standardized reporting systems. In emerging markets such as India, a significant proportion of FMCG personal care brands operate as privately held entities and do not consistently disclose ESG-related data. Consequently, reliance on ESG metrics alone limits the scope of sustainability evaluation and excludes a large segment of green-oriented brands that actively participate in environmentally responsible practices but lack formal reporting structures.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature in green marketing focuses on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, often emphasizing psychological constructs rather than objective measures of sustainability performance. While these studies provide valuable insights into consumer behavior, they do not adequately address the need for a systematic and quantifiable method to assess the authenticity of green claims at the brand level. This creates a significant methodological gap, particularly in contexts where certification-based validation plays a crucial role in establishing credibility.

In this context, certification-based sustainability assessment emerges as a more reliable and verifiable alternative. Third-party certifications such as ISO environmental standards, organic certifications, cruelty-free recognition, and toxin-free validation provide measurable indicators of a brand's environmental and ethical commitments. Unlike self-declared claims, these certifications offer standardized benchmarks that enhance transparency, reduce ambiguity, and strengthen consumer trust.

Addressing the need for a structured evaluation framework, the present study develops a Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII), a composite and quantifiable index designed to measure sustainability credibility based on verifiable certification indicators. The GCII converts qualitative sustainability attributes into measurable parameters, assigns weights based on the relative rigor and credibility of certifications, and enables systematic comparison across brands. By moving beyond perception-based evaluation toward certification-based measurement, the study provides a more objective and transparent approach to assessing green brand authenticity.

The development of the GCII contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable marketing by bridging the gap between green positioning and measurable sustainability performance. It offers a methodological advancement in sustainability research while providing practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and consumers seeking credible and comparable indicators of environmental responsibility in the FMCG personal care sector.

2. Literature Review

The growing emphasis on environmental sustainability has significantly influenced both academic research and business practices, particularly in the domain of green marketing and consumer behavior. Green marketing involves the integration of environmental considerations into product development, promotion, and distribution processes, with the objective of minimizing ecological impact while creating competitive advantage. In the FMCG sector, where consumption is frequent and large-scale, green marketing has emerged as a strategic response to increasing environmental awareness and regulatory pressure (Reddy et al., 2023).

A substantial body of literature has examined consumer behavior toward green products using behavioral frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Ajzen (1991) proposed that behavioral intention is determined by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, providing a robust foundation for understanding environmentally responsible consumption. Empirical studies have extended this framework in the context of green products. For instance, Paul et al. (2016) found that attitude and perceived behavioral control significantly influence green purchase intention, while environmental concern enhances the predictive power of the model. Similarly, Yadav and Pathak (2016) demonstrated that environmental concern and environmental knowledge significantly strengthen the explanatory capacity of TPB, with environmental concern emerging as a key determinant of purchase intention.

Despite the growing awareness of environmental issues, several studies highlight a persistent attitude–behavior gap in green consumption. Gupta and Ogden (2009) explain this gap through a social dilemma perspective, suggesting that consumers may hesitate to purchase green products due to perceived individual costs and uncertainty about others' participation. Joshi and Rahman (2015) further identify key barriers such as high prices, limited availability, and lack of trust in green claims, which prevent consumers from translating positive attitudes into actual purchasing behavior. These challenges are particularly relevant in emerging markets, where economic and informational constraints influence consumer decision-making.

In addition to behavioral factors, the literature also emphasizes the role of green brand equity in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. Chen (2010) identifies green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust as critical drivers of green brand equity, demonstrating that these constructs significantly influence consumer trust and loyalty. Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015) further highlight that environmental responsibility, prior experience, and social influence play important roles in green purchasing decisions. However, these constructs are largely perception-based and depend heavily on the credibility of the brand's environmental claims.

The issue of credibility has therefore become central to green marketing research. Moisander (2007) argues that consumers often face difficulties in evaluating the authenticity of green products due to lack of clear information and conflicting motivations. Johnstone and Tan (2015) identify additional barriers such as skepticism toward green claims, perceived inconvenience, and social stigma associated with green consumption. These findings suggest that trust in green marketing is not solely determined by communication strategies but also by the perceived legitimacy and verifiability of environmental claims.

To enhance credibility, certification-based validation has been widely recognized as an important mechanism. Delmas and Burbano (2011) emphasize that third-party certifications can reduce greenwashing by providing objective verification of environmental practices. In the FMCG personal care sector, certifications such as ISO environmental standards, organic labels, cruelty-free recognition, and toxin-free validation serve as important indicators of sustainability and ethical production (Chen, 2010; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). These certifications not only enhance transparency but also strengthen consumer trust by offering standardized and verifiable information.

However, despite the acknowledged importance of certification, existing research has not developed systematic frameworks to quantify sustainability based on certification intensity. Most studies continue to rely on qualitative assessments or perception-based measures, limiting the ability to compare brands objectively. Furthermore, commonly used sustainability evaluation tools such as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks are primarily applicable to publicly listed corporations and rely on formal disclosure

systems (Eccles et al., 2014). This restricts their applicability in the FMCG personal care sector, where many green-oriented brands are privately held and do not disclose standardized ESG data.

Therefore, while prior studies provide valuable insights into consumer behavior, brand perception, and the importance of trust in green marketing, they reveal a critical gap in the objective measurement of sustainability credibility. This limitation underscores the need for a structured, quantifiable, and certification-based framework that can systematically evaluate and compare green brand authenticity. The present study addresses this need through the development of the Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII).

3. Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of research on green marketing, consumer behavior, and sustainable branding, the issue of sustainability credibility remains insufficiently addressed in existing literature. Prior studies have largely focused on understanding consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and psychological determinants of green consumption using frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Paul et al., 2016; Yadav & Pathak, 2016). While these approaches provide valuable insights into consumer decision-making, they predominantly rely on perception-based constructs and do not offer objective mechanisms for evaluating the authenticity of green claims at the brand level.

Furthermore, research on green brand equity emphasizes constructs such as brand image, trust, and satisfaction as key drivers of consumer behavior (Chen, 2010; Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015). However, these constructs are inherently dependent on perceived credibility and are often influenced by marketing communication rather than verifiable sustainability performance. As a result, the distinction between genuinely sustainable brands and those relying on symbolic or unsubstantiated claims remains unclear.

The literature also highlights the persistent attitude–behavior gap, where consumers express environmental concern but fail to translate it into actual purchasing behavior due to factors such as price sensitivity, limited availability, and lack of trust (Gupta & Ogden, 2009; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). This trust deficit is closely linked to the absence of standardized and transparent measures that can validate green claims and reduce uncertainty in consumer decision-making.

Although certification-based mechanisms such as ISO standards, organic labels, and cruelty-free recognition are acknowledged as credible indicators of environmental and ethical practices, existing studies have not systematically integrated these certifications into a unified and quantifiable framework for measuring sustainability. Most research continues to treat certifications as individual signals rather than as components of a structured evaluation model. In addition, commonly used sustainability assessment approaches remain limited in their applicability to the FMCG personal care sector, particularly in emerging markets where many brands operate as privately held entities without standardized disclosure systems.

Therefore, while prior studies provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and green brand perception, they reveal a critical gap in the objective measurement of sustainability credibility. This limitation underscores the need for a structured, transparent, and quantifiable framework that can systematically evaluate and compare green brand authenticity. Addressing this gap, the present study proposes the development of a Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII), which enables the conversion of certification-based sustainability indicators into measurable metrics for comparative analysis across FMCG personal care brands.

4. Objectives of the Study

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To develop a certification-based index (GCII) for measuring sustainability credibility in the FMCG personal care sector.
2. To evaluate selected FMCG personal care brands using the GCII framework.
3. To classify brands into different levels of sustainability intensity based on certification-based scoring.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design and Conceptual Approach

The present study adopts a conceptual and methodological research design aimed at developing a structured framework for measuring sustainability credibility in the FMCG personal care sector. Unlike traditional studies that rely on perception-based measures or financial indicators, this research focuses on certification-based evaluation to provide an objective assessment of environmental and ethical practices.

The study is grounded in the premise that sustainability credibility can be more accurately assessed through verifiable certification indicators rather than self-declared claims or subjective consumer perceptions. In the context of green FMCG personal care brands, where sustainability positioning often varies in intensity and transparency, a quantifiable and standardized measurement framework is essential for ensuring analytical consistency and comparability.

The conceptual framework of the study is based on a structured transformation process in which certification-based sustainability indicators serve as inputs to the GCII model. These inputs are evaluated through a weighted scoring mechanism, resulting in a composite sustainability score. The output of the model is the classification of brands into different levels of sustainability intensity. This framework enables the conversion of qualitative sustainability attributes into quantifiable and comparable metrics, thereby enhancing transparency and objectivity in green marketing evaluation.

5.2 Rationale for Developing the Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII)

Existing sustainability assessment approaches, particularly Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, are largely applicable to publicly listed corporations and rely on formal disclosure mechanisms. However, a significant proportion of FMCG personal care brands operate as privately held entities and do not consistently provide standardized ESG data. This limitation restricts the applicability of conventional evaluation tools in assessing sustainability performance within this sector.

To address this limitation, the present study develops the Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII), a composite and researcher-developed index designed to convert qualitative sustainability claims into quantifiable indicators. The GCII enables systematic comparison across brands by incorporating verifiable certification parameters and assigning weighted scores based on their relative rigor and credibility.

The development of GCII aligns with multidimensional sustainability assessment approaches, which emphasize the need for composite indices to enhance transparency, comparability, and methodological rigor in environmental evaluation.

5.3 Selection of Sustainability Parameters

The GCII is constructed based on key certification indicators that reflect environmental responsibility, ethical production practices, and product safety standards. These parameters were selected based on their relevance to the FMCG personal care sector and their recognition in sustainability and regulatory frameworks.

The key parameters included in the index are:

- ISO 14001 Environmental Management Certification
- International Organic Certification (e.g., ECOCERT/COSMOS)
- Made Safe Certification
- PETA Cruelty-Free Certification
- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) Certification
- Plastic Neutral or Sustainability Initiatives
- Public Sustainability Disclosure

These parameters collectively capture multiple dimensions of sustainability, including environmental management, ingredient safety, ethical practices, and corporate transparency.

5.4 Weighting Structure of the GCII

Each parameter in the GCII is assigned a specific weight based on its relative environmental rigor, credibility, and level of standardization. Certifications with stringent international standards and product-level verification are assigned higher weights, while those reflecting general compliance or supportive initiatives are assigned comparatively lower weights.

The weighting structure of the GCII was developed based on the relative rigor, standardization, and credibility of each certification. Certifications such as international organic standards and ISO 14001 were assigned higher weights due to their strict compliance requirements, global recognition, and third-party verification mechanisms. Moderate weights were assigned to certifications reflecting ethical practices and sustainability initiatives, while lower weights were given to general compliance certifications such as GMP. The weighting approach is consistent with prior sustainability assessment studies that emphasize the importance of differential weighting in composite index construction to enhance analytical accuracy and reliability. The weighting structure is as follows:

Table 1: Weight Structure of GCII

Sl. No.	Description	Weight
1.	International Organic Certification	4
2.	ISO 14001 Environmental Management	3
3.	Made Safe Certification	3
4.	PETA Cruelty-Free Certification	2
5.	Plastic Neutral/Sustainability Initiatives	2
6.	Public Sustainability Disclosure	2
7.	GMP Certification	1

The maximum possible GCII score is 17. This weighted approach ensures that certifications with higher environmental credibility contribute more significantly to the overall sustainability score.

5.5 Scoring and Evaluation of Brands

Each selected brand is evaluated based on the presence or absence of the identified certification parameters. Scores are assigned according to the predefined weighting structure, and the total score for each brand is calculated by summing the individual parameter scores.

The evaluation is based on publicly available certification disclosures obtained from official brand websites and recognized certification authorities. This approach ensures transparency, replicability, and objectivity in the assessment process.

The scoring results indicate measurable variation in sustainability intensity across brands, highlighting differences in certification adoption and environmental commitment.

5.6 Sustainability Intensity Classification

To facilitate interpretation, GCII scores are categorized into three levels of sustainability intensity:

Table 2: GCII-Based Sustainability Classification

Score Range	Sustainability Intensity Level	Interpretation
9-17	High Sustainability Intensity	Strong certification-based validation
5-8	Moderate Sustainability Intensity	Partial certification and ethical positioning
0-4	Low / Claim-Based Sustainability	Limited certification, reliance on brand claims

This classification enables structured differentiation among brands and provides a clear framework for comparing sustainability credibility.

5.7 Methodological Contribution

The GCII framework contributes to sustainability research by providing a structured and quantifiable approach to measuring green brand credibility. Unlike perception-based models, the index offers an objective evaluation based on verifiable certification indicators. It enhances methodological rigor by converting qualitative sustainability attributes into measurable metrics, enabling comparative analysis across brands.
Furthermore, the GCII addresses the limitations of existing sustainability assessment frameworks by providing an alternative approach suitable for privately held FMCG brands that lack standardized ESG disclosures. The framework also reduces subjectivity in sustainability evaluation and improves the reliability and transparency of green marketing research.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 GCII-Based Evaluation of Selected Brands

The application of the Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII) to selected FMCG personal care brands reveals significant variation in sustainability credibility based on certification intensity.

Table 3: GCII Scores of Selected FMCG Personal Care Brands

Brand Name	GCII Score	Sustainability Category
Himalaya Herbals	12	High Sustainability
Mamaearth	11	High Sustainability
Plum Goodness	7	Moderate Sustainability
Khadi Natural	4	Low Sustainability
Forest Essentials	3	Low Sustainability
Biotique	3	Low Sustainability

As shown in Table 3, the scoring results indicate that brands differ considerably in their adoption of verifiable sustainability practices, reflecting varying degrees of environmental commitment and transparency.

Brands such as Himalaya Herbals and Mamaearth achieved the highest scores, indicating a high level of sustainability intensity supported by multiple certifications and verified initiatives. These brands demonstrate a relatively strong integration of environmental management systems, ethical production

standards, and sustainability disclosures. In contrast, brands such as Plum Goodness exhibit moderate sustainability intensity, reflecting selective adoption of certification mechanisms and ethical positioning.

On the other hand, brands including Khadi Natural, Forest Essentials, and Biotique fall within the low or claim-based sustainability category. Although these brands emphasize natural ingredients and traditional positioning, their relatively lower certification scores indicate limited third-party validation of sustainability practices. This suggests a reliance on brand claims and marketing narratives rather than structured and verifiable certification frameworks.

6.2 Interpretation of Sustainability Intensity

The GCII-based classification highlights the importance of certification as a key determinant of sustainability credibility. Brands with higher GCII scores demonstrate stronger alignment with standardized environmental and ethical practices, thereby enhancing their credibility in the market. In contrast, lower-scoring brands illustrate the limitations of claim-based green positioning, where the absence of verifiable certifications may lead to ambiguity and reduced consumer trust.

The findings also indicate that sustainability intensity is not uniform across brands, even within the same product category. This variation underscores the need for a structured measurement framework that can differentiate between levels of sustainability rather than treating all green brands as homogeneous.

6.3 Implications for Green Marketing Credibility

The results reinforce the argument that certification-based validation plays a crucial role in addressing the credibility challenges associated with green marketing. By providing objective and standardized indicators, certifications reduce information asymmetry and help consumers make more informed decisions.

The GCII framework demonstrates its effectiveness in converting diverse certification signals into a unified metric, thereby enabling comparative evaluation across brands. This not only enhances transparency but also reduces the risk of greenwashing by distinguishing between substantively sustainable brands and those relying primarily on symbolic claims.

Furthermore, the classification model developed through GCII offers practical insights for marketers, highlighting the importance of investing in credible certifications to strengthen brand positioning and consumer trust. It also provides a useful tool for policymakers and regulatory bodies to promote standardization and accountability in green marketing practices.

7. Conclusion

The increasing prominence of sustainability in the FMCG personal care sector has intensified the need for credible and standardized methods to evaluate green marketing claims. While existing research has extensively explored consumer behavior and green brand perception, it has largely overlooked the objective measurement of sustainability credibility at the brand level. This limitation has contributed to ambiguity in distinguishing genuinely sustainable brands from those relying on unverified claims.

Addressing this gap, the present study developed the Green Certification Intensity Index (GCII), a structured and quantifiable framework designed to assess sustainability credibility based on verifiable certification indicators. By incorporating multiple certification parameters and assigning weighted scores based on their relative rigor and credibility, the GCII provides a transparent and systematic approach to evaluating green brand authenticity.

The application of the GCII to selected FMCG personal care brands demonstrates its effectiveness in differentiating levels of sustainability intensity. The findings highlight that certification-based validation plays a critical role in enhancing credibility, reducing greenwashing, and improving transparency in green marketing practices.

7.1 Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to the literature on green marketing and sustainability by introducing a novel methodological framework that shifts the focus from perception-based evaluation to certification-based measurement. The GCII extends existing research by providing a structured approach to quantifying sustainability credibility, thereby addressing a key gap in sustainability assessment models.

7.2 Managerial Implications

For practitioners, the findings emphasize the importance of adopting credible and verifiable certifications to strengthen green brand positioning. Marketers can utilize the GCII framework to benchmark their sustainability performance and identify areas for improvement. The index also highlights the role of transparency and standardized disclosure in building consumer trust and competitive advantage.

7.3 Policy Implications

The study offers valuable insights for policymakers and regulatory authorities by demonstrating the need for standardized certification frameworks and monitoring mechanisms in green marketing. The GCII can serve as a reference tool for developing guidelines that enhance accountability and reduce misleading environmental claims in the FMCG sector.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides a structured framework for measuring sustainability credibility, it is limited to selected FMCG personal care brands and relies on publicly available certification data. Future research can extend the application of the GCII to other product categories and geographical regions. Additionally, integrating consumer perception with certification-based measures may provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable consumption behavior. Further studies may also refine the weighting structure of the index and explore longitudinal analysis to examine changes in sustainability intensity over time.

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